

## **Michigan Every Day** **By Patrick Sullivan and Carole Eberly**

*Oct. 20, 2001*

*“Gateway to Freedom” installed at Detroit River*

Detroit played a critical role in the Underground Railroad in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was the last stop for slaves headed to freedom in Canada and many brave Detroiters, as well as other Michiganders, aided the fleeing slaves.

To commemorate this history, the development group Detroit 300 commissioned two sculptures, one installed in Detroit, the other in Windsor. They were dedicated on Oct. 20, 2001. The Detroit sculpture features nine slaves led by an Underground Railroad Conductor, framed by two pillars. The “conductor” points toward freedom in Canada.

The conductor in the statue is a likeness of George deBaptiste, a former steward of President William Henry Harrison. DeBaptiste worked as a caterer during the day and helped escaping slaves by night. To cross the river, deBaptiste was forced to hire a white steamship captain because blacks were not issued pilot licenses. In Windsor, the commemoration features a 22-foot tall granite “Freedom Tower,” with statues of a male slave showing thanks, a female slave holding a baby and a female Underground Railroad operator welcoming them.